AMENDMENTS TO AND LISTING OF THE CLAIMS

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listing, of claims in the application.

Please amend the claims as follows:

1-9. (Canceled).

10. (Currently amended) A method for preventing contamination during the processing of aqueous solutions in open and automated systems comprising covering said aqueous solutions with a contamination barrier comprising at least one water immiscible hydrocarbon or hydrocarbon mixture,

wherein said covering prevents contamination during transfer of said aqueous solutions, and[[/or]] said covering prevents formation of aqueous aerosols, while allowing for removal and processing of said aqueous solutions under the contamination barrier without contamination from the contamination barrier; and

wherein said at least one water immiscible hydrocarbon or hydrocarbon mixture comprises branched or unbranched hydrocarbons of from 6 to 16 carbon atoms.

11. (Previously presented) The method of claim 10, wherein said hydrocarbon is an unsubstituted hydrocarbon.

12. (Previously presented) The method of claim 10, wherein said hydrocarbon is a substituted hydrocarbon.

13. (Previously presented) The method of claim 10, wherein said hydrocarbon is a saturated or unsaturated cyclic hydrocarbon.

14. (Previously presented) The method of claim 10, wherein said hydrocarbon is a branched or unbranched acyclic hydrocarbon.

15. (Previously presented) The method of claim 10, wherein said hydrocarbon is comprised of from 8 to 12 carbon atoms.

16. (Previously presented) The method of claim 10, wherein said hydrocarbon is a branched or unbranched alkane.

17. (Previously presented) The method of claim 16, wherein said alkane is selected from the group consisting of octane, nonane, decane and dodecane and mixtures thereof.

18-23. (Canceled).

24. (Previously presented) The method of claim 16, wherein said branched or unbranched alkane is comprised of from 8 to 12 carbon atoms.

25. (Currently amended) A method for preventing contamination during the processing of aqueous solutions in open and automated systems comprising covering said aqueous solutions with a contamination barrier comprising silicone oil, wherein said covering prevents contamination during transfer of said aqueous solutions, and[[/or]] said covering prevents formation of aqueous aerosols, while allowing for removal and processing of said aqueous solutions under the contamination barrier without contamination from the contamination barrier.

26. (Previously presented) The method of claim 25, wherein said silicone oil comprises unbranched chains of silicon and oxygen atoms having a chain length of 10 to 1000 silicon atoms.

27. (Previously presented) The method of claim 26, wherein said silicone oil comprises unbranched chains of silicon and oxygen atoms having a chain length of 30 to 500 silicon atoms.

28. (Previously presented) The method of claim 27, wherein said silicone oil comprises unbranched chains of silicon and oxygen atoms having a chain length of 50 to 150 silicon atoms.

29. (Previously presented) The method of claim 26, wherein said contamination barrier consists of silicone oil.